

On structural change: practice organizations and institutional logics

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Received: 13 February 2023 / Accepted: 2 June 2023 / Published online: 10 July 2023
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Abstract This essay explores structural changes in practices through a convergence between a particular version of the institutional logics approach in institutional theory and my own account of social practices. Part one presents these approaches as contemporary versions of the idea that objective, or common, contentful orientations govern social practices. The discussion elucidates logics and practice organizations as arrays of such orientations and explores how they shape human activity, criticizing the cognitivism of institutional logics in the name of a more practical account of the relationship between structuring contents and practices. Part two describes how both accounts treat human activity as responsible for changes in governing orientations. Whereas institutional logicians focus on types of action concatenations and the conditions under which action concatenations bring about such changes, my account highlights the sorts of nexuses of activity chains and materiality responsible.

Keywords Structural change (strukturelle Veränderung) · Institutional logics · Practice theory (Theorie der Praktiken) · Structure and action (Struktur und Handeln)

Theories of practices champion social practices as the central phenomenon in social life. They argue that practices are the principal building blocks of social phenomena and attribute social changes to features and determinants of practices. Practice theories are also often associated with the idea that social life is in perpetual motion: the realm of practice, embracing practices and the activities that compose them,

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develops and metamorphoses incessantly. Because of this, theories of practices are sometimes identified as a kind of process theory.

However, the social world envisioned by theories of practices also embraces a significant dose of structure. To begin with, practices and the constellations they form evince many structures of the pattern type. Because of this, practice theories join most social theories in recognizing structures of this weak, empiricist sort. Practices and practice constellations likewise exhibit structures of a more substantial sort. Because of this, theories of practices join ranks with three prominent clusters of so-called “structuralist” theories that recognize the existence of social structures other than patterns: classic French structuralism (e.g., Levi-Strauss, Althusser, early Foucault), British critical realism (e.g., Bhaskar, Archer, Sayer), and American network theory (e.g., White, Burt, Granovetter).

The observation that practice theory is structuralist should surprise no one. Bourdieu and Giddens have regularly been classified as neostructuralists, and their views on the relationship between action and structure have received extensive commentary. To be sure, neither of these things is true of other theorists of practices. Still, all practice theorists hold that practices are ordered, or organized, and that what does the organizing is something of a different kind from what it organizes. This cleft is one key feature of the structures advocated by the prominent structuralisms cited in the previous paragraph. Another such feature is that entities of the two sorts belong to different ontological categories. Practices, for instance, are composed of activities, and activities are events-processes. By contrast, that which organizes the activities composing a practice does not happen; it, instead, exists. Existing does not mean that structures are immutable, nor that changes in them cannot arise from what they govern. But it does indicate, among other things, that structures and activities persist differently over time.

Theorists of practices agree about what is organized: human activities. They disagree, however, about what organizes them. In Bourdieu, human activities and the arenas in which they transpire are structured by—among other things—position spaces defined by distributions of multiple capitals, whereas in Giddens they are structured by sets of rules and resources. In Shove and her compatriots, following Reckwitz, activities are structured by blocks of meaning, competence, and materiality, while in Kemmis they are structured in semantic, physical, and social spaces by cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements. According to my own account, finally, activities are structured by sets of rules and normativized understandings, teleologies, and emotions. Position spaces in distributions of capitals, sets of rules and resources, blocks of meaning, competence, and materiality, cultural-discursive and other arrangements, and sets of understandings, rules, and teleoaffectivities are all distinct and of ontological categories different from the activities they govern. Hence, despite their process-like focus on activities, practices, and constant happening, theories of practices are also decidedly structuralist in character.

Analyses of social change often focus on the more directly experientiable or measurable aspects or forms of change. *Vis-à-vis* practice theories, this empiricist tendency manifests as analyses that focus on activities, material set-ups, and measurable features of activity-amid-material set-ups. The present essay takes up a less

tangible dimension of social change, namely, changes in what organizes practices. Such changes form one type of ingredient out of which social changes consist. Changes in what organizes practices tend to occur in lockstep with other ingredients of social change, for example, alterations in activities, material arrangements, participants, and relations (see section four). Nonetheless, I will mostly abstract from this entanglement in the following and focus on structural changes alone.

Practice organizations as I conceive of them closely resemble what is known in institutional theory as institutional logics. In recent decades, institutional theory has come to be housed in organizational studies, though it began in sociology (e.g., Selznick 1957), still today draws in sociology, and continues to exhibit considerable sociological sophistication. Institutional logics are the conceptual centerpiece of one prominent approach to institutions in this field. The most influential version of this approach interprets a logic as something like a set of symbolic or conceptual contents, or better, orientations that centrally animates goings-on in a particular cluster or domain of practices. So interpreted, logics bear considerable resemblance to what organizes practices as I conceive of this: institutional logics and practice organizations alike embrace content-ful orientations that govern practices. In fact, theories of institutional logics and my theory of practices—as well as other theories of practices such as Giddens’—have developed contemporary versions of a conception of social structure that harks back to an earlier era of objective contents (e.g., Dilthey, Cassirer; see Turner 2014). It turns out, moreover, that the determination of emergence and change in institutional logics resembles the determination of emergence and change in practice organizations. For these reasons, the following discussion explores structural changes in practices through this convergence with changes in institutional logics.

1 Institutional logics

The overall institutional logics approach includes far too many positions to be covered here in detail. Although I will discuss several positions, my discussion will highlight the so-called “institutional logics perspective” (e.g., Thornton et al. 2012) and sometimes use its widely cited ideas as a stand-in for this broader field. The basic idea of the institutional logics perspective is that social reality is a multi-level complex of fields, institutions, and organizations (also individuals) that are governed by institutional logics. The idea is often formulated as the thesis that logics govern the *practices* that populate fields, compose institutions and organizations, and are carried on by people. As the word “logic” might suggest, an institutional logic is something like a guiding *ratio*. Such *ratios*, as is elucidated below, govern practices by shaping a mental apparatuses that allegedly lie behind individuals’ actions. A better word than *ratio* in this context is the French *sens*, which means at once meaning and direction. The overall intuition of this perspective is, thus, that social life is governed by arrays of meaning- and direction-giving orientations, each of which structures particular organizations, institutions, or fields.

In the article that is widely credited with giving birth to the institutional logics perspective, Friedland and Alford describe a logic as a “set of material practices

and symbolic constructions—which constitutes [the] organizing principles ...” of an institutional order (Friedland and Alford 1991, p. 248). This quotation characterizes a logic (1) as a combination of practices and symbolic constructions and (2) as a principle. Both these ideas have remained prominent in the institutional logics literature, though their juxtaposition reveals an ambiguity about whether a logic is an intellectual-cognitive (*geistige*) entity (a ratio or sens in the form of a principle) or such an entity together with the practices it informs.¹

The complex of ideas is reflected in the initial characterization of logics offered in what is the closest thing to a definitive text in the institutional logics movement set off by Friedland and Alford’s 1991 article, Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury’s *The Institutional Logics Perspective*. On p. 2 the authors define an institutional logic as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences” (cf. Glaser et al. 2017, p. 36). Lower on that page they describe a logic as the “unique organizing principles, practices, and symbols” that govern certain individuals and organizations. The authors resolve the ambiguity mentioned in the previous paragraph by analytically distinguishing between a symbolic formulation and a symbolic formulation that informs practices: only the latter is an institutional logic.

As noted, the extant, subtly different versions of this basic conception of institutional logics will not be canvassed in the present context. One divergent interpretation, however, should be mentioned. It treats institutional logics as systems of beliefs (e.g., Lounsbury and Ventresca 2003). This is an important interpretation because it makes explicit that logics must somehow connect to what, as a matter of intellectual history, has been taken to “determine” human activity, namely, mind. The ontological status of entities such as principles, assumptions, and values has long been a matter of philosophical controversy. One traditionally prominent interpretation is that such entities, or at least values and principles, are objective phenomena that exist independent of minds. Over the course of the 20th-century, objective construals of values and principles gave way to the conviction that such entities are “contained” in or “relative” to human minds (or practices). The idea that institutional logics are belief systems exemplifies this way of thinking since it connects logics directly to—by embedding them in—mind; values, for instance, become beliefs that this and that are of great value. This idea thus obviates the need to call on entities posited by other sciences such as cognitive psychology to mediate the connection between logics and activity/practices. As we shall see, Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury maintain that logics govern activity, and thereby the practices that activity composes, by shaping the cognitive apparatus that they see underlying behavior.

¹ In subsequent writing, Friedland has substituted the idea of an institutional substance for that of symbolic constructions. He has also interpreted substances as centered in values (e.g., 2009) or principles (e.g., 2017) or as nonphenomenal practice goods, i.e., teleo-ontologies that inform both what is and what is aimed at in a set of practices (e.g., 2021). Examples of substances are property, democracy, love, divinity, and knowledge. Bourdieu, incidentally, articulates a parallel idea in highlighting the idea of something being at stake in particular social spaces or fields.

I want to emphasize two features of institutional logics à la Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury. One is that they are linguistic entities: the symbolic constructions that help constitute logics on their account have linguistic contents. This is so because assumptions, values, and principles are the specific assumptions, values, and principles they are only as linguistically articulated. A principle such as Do no harm to others, for instance, is this particular principle only as articulated with these (or similar) words. As a result, language, vocabularies, and categories (i.e., linguistically marked categories) take center stage as constituting institutional logics (e.g., Loewenstein et al. 2012; Ocasio et al. 2015). As far as I know, however, Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury do not presume that assumptions, values, and principles are *explicitly* articulated, that is, that actors are aware of them as such. Assumptions, values, and principles can inform activity tacitly, that is, inexplicitly (these items thereby resemble the contentful tacit rules that Giddens (1984) claims govern activity). Assumptions, values, and practices can also be “implicit” in activities and practices in the sense of being discernable in or reconstructable from them. Nonetheless, the fact that these entities have linguistic content raises significant philosophical questions. For example, How do such linguistic entities manage to govern/inform/shape human activity/practices? How does the alleged governing power of these linguistic entities jibe with the sort of unformulable practical understanding or knowing how to go on that above all Wittgenstein and arguably also Heidegger unearthed as fundamental to human activity (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1976; Dreyfus 1992; Shotter 1996; Schatzki 1997; Ginsborg 2020; for recognition of this situation, see Smets and Jarzabkowski 2013)?

One can also ask where logics, more specifically, their constitutive symbolic constructions exist. The idea that these constructions are linguistically contentful points toward an answer, namely, that they can exist wherever such contents do. But where is this? My Wittgensteinian intuitions say that linguistic contents exist where linguistic formulations do, thus in speech acts and written texts (including, *inter alia*, computer programs). By contrast, the cognitive psychological leanings of institutional theorists such as Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury presumably fosters the claim that linguistic contents subsist, not just in linguistic formulations, but in minds, or brains, too. This is treacherous territory philosophically, which cannot be explored here.

The second feature I want to emphasize is that human practices are governed by a multiplicity of institutional logics. This multiplicity embraces the existence of logics on different “levels”—e.g., society, institutions, and organizations—as well as multiple logics on particular levels. Similarly (although theorists of institutional logics unevenly emphasize this point), individual cognition is shaped by all the logics that govern the practices in which a person participates. The institutional logics literature has addressed this situation under the label institutional “complexity” or “contradiction” and stressed that individuals can be subject to incompatible, even contradictory, directives, aims, and ways of understanding. However, the plenum of practices is such that the range of logics that govern human activity is potentially very large. For a logic exists whenever a distinct package of assumptions, values, and principles—or a distinct set of corresponding beliefs or a distinct teleontology—governs a set of practices. And *so many* assumptions, values, and princi-

ples—especially assumptions—govern human activity and practices that, potentially, a very large number of such packages exist. How many logics *actually* exist depends on how such items actually hang together as distinct packages that inform particular sets of practices.

I am not aware that the institutional logics literature has addressed this issue. Instead, institutional theorists tend in their research to describe intuitively plausible or empirically discerned packages that can be given an obvious name, e.g., “management care logic,” “state regulatory logic,” “transnational commons logic,” and “local safety logic.” Especially at the societal level, moreover, institutional logics theorists invoke orders or fields such as capitalism, science, family, and religion that are familiar to readers of social theory and whose basic values and principles have been widely discussed by generations of social theorists. By contrast, identifying logics at lower levels requires looking and seeing.

The relationship between logics—on whatever level—and activity has been assimilated to the relationship between structure and agency as Giddens and Bourdieu analyze it (Battilana and D’Aunno 2009; see also Lounsbury and Ventresca 2003). This assimilation ties the reproduction, and thus persistence, of logics to the practice-constituting activities they govern. Bourdieu and Giddens, however, highlight practical understanding—in the guise of habitus and practical consciousness, respectively—in their accounts of activity and claim that structures—position spaces in distributions of capital or sets of rules and resources—govern activity by working through practical understanding. If institutional logicians were to accept that practical understanding is central to the “determination” of activity, they could no longer construe the symbolic constructions that compose logics as tacit linguistic contents; they would have to recognize that these constructions are made up of explicit formulations alone (see Bourdieu 1976, but contrast Giddens 1984, chapt. 1, and see Schatzki 1997). These implications, in turn, would indicate that logics à la Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury are best construed as values and principles alone and not also assumptions (as, by the way, Friedland and Alford do in their 1991 article). Following these counsels would make identifying the logics at work in social life more manageable. It would also move logics even closer to practice organizations as I conceive of them.

Bourdieu and Giddens also famously claim that structure enables and constrains agency: structure, at once, provides agency possibilities and limits which these are. According to Cardinale (2018), much of the institutional logics literature accepts the idea that structure cum institutional logics constrains and enables action. Some of this same literature, he further claims, has argued that structure must do more than this: it must also “orient” (direct, cause) actors to carry out particular possible actions, rather than others, in particular situations. This literature, however, he continues, has been remiss in theorizing this narrowing direction. Adopting a broadly Bourdieuan position and arguing that this orienting does not work through conscious awareness or thought, Cardinale suggests that institutional logics directly “imprint dispositions” in people that subsequently impel them to perform particular possible actions instead of others in particular circumstances.

Far more commonly, however, institutional theorists draw on cognitive psychology to conceptualize an apparatus that stands behind activity. In their eyes, logics

govern activity, and thereby practices, by engaging a cognitive apparatus. Thornton et al. (2012, chapt. 4) account of this apparatus is unusually detailed and widely cited. According to the authors, individual activity is boundedly intentional (cf. Simon 1957 on bounded rationality), that is, people's intentions are circumscribed—by what they identify with (their social identities), the goals they are actively pursuing, and the cognitive schemes that they have acquired. Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury hold, further, that what people intentionally do on any particular occasion rests on what they are attending to. This thesis makes attention central to moment-to-moment conduct (see Ocasio 2011 and compare Schatzki 2016). All told, then, institutional logics determine activity by shaping a cognitive apparatus that underlies it: by molding attention, the goals people pursue, and what they identify with, as well as by implanting cognitive schemes. Hence, logics shape action, not by directly molding or generating it, but instead by shaping and effecting what generates it (on schemes in this context, see Glaser et al. 2017). Note the classic causal language used to describe these two processes: logics *shape* particular cognitive apparatuses that in turn *generate* actions.²

2 The organizations of practices

By “practice organizations” I mean what organizes, or orders, individual practices, or more precisely, what organizes activities *as* practices. I do not mean what organizes constellations of practices. What organizes practice constellations on my account includes elements that parallel the logics that institutional theorists attribute to institutional orders or fields. But exploring this organization and this parallel would make the current essay much longer; the present focus is convergences between (changes in) institutional logics and (changes in) practice organizations.

On my account, what organizes practices are arrays of understandings, rules, and teleoaffectivities (for details on the following, see Schatzki 2002). Parallel to an institutional logic, a practice exists, that is, activities are organized, when there exists a clump of activities that are governed by elements of an array of understandings, rules, and teleoaffectivities. The different activities that make up, say, the practice of bourbon distillation in central Kentucky (see Schatzki 2019) are governed by varying subsets of an array of such items. Items of these sorts cohere as an array partly by virtue of governing the same activities and partly via cross-referencing. Rules, for instance, might mention ends or projects that are components of the teleoaffectivities. Items of these sorts also cohere as an array by virtue of containing the same building blocks. They might, for instance, be tied to the same roles/identities or as formulated draw on the same concepts. In addition, practitioners of a practice usually have a word for it. This word marks the existence of a clump of

² By “X causes Y” I mean that X is responsible for the Y event or state of affairs (see Schatzki 2019). I do not suggest that there is any relation of necessity between X and Y. To speak of logics “shaping” cognitive apparatuses is to attribute responsibility to them for this or that aspect of such apparatuses, whereas to speak of cognitive apparatuses as “generating” activity is to hold them responsible for the occurrence or coming about of activities.

activities governed by an array of understandings, rules, and teleoaffectivities and serves as a clue of the practice's existence.

Understandings of two sorts organize practices: practical and general. Almost all human beings possess a repertoire of bodily actions that they can perform without further ado. Practical understanding is knowing which bodily actions to perform in particular settings and situations to carry out the intentional actions that make sense to one to perform. Participants in a practice share practical understandings: they understand what actions participants are performing in carrying out particular bodily actions. The second kind of understanding that organizes practices is general understandings. A general understanding is a sense of something, an ethos, that suffuses and is explicitly articulated to some degree or other in practices. An example is the sense of heritage and quality that informs Kentucky practices of bourbon production and advertising. A general understanding suffuses a practice when participants proceed out a sense of something, which is expressed in what they do (and how they do it) and can be formulated, to varying degrees of explicitness, in what they say.

As intimated, meanwhile, rules are explicit formulations: directives, admonishments, instructions, and the like which are formulated as such in spoken and written texts. Examples are a rule of thumb repeated, or an admonishment uttered, by a master distiller about mixing certain ingredients when distilling select bourbons. "Teleoaffectivities," finally, are ends, end-project-task combinations, and emotions that are normativized in a practice, that is, that are acceptable or prescribed in it, possibly in relation to the identities, positions, or roles people bear. All told, then, practice organization provides the normativity, and also helps institute the intelligibility, that imbue a practice: general understandings have implications for the ends participants should or may pursue as well as the actions they should or may perform, whereas rules explicitly articulate such matters and teleoaffectivities delimit projects, tasks, and conditions that practitioners should or may carry out, pursue, or embody. Together with practical understandings, these items provide practitioners with shared resources for proceeding in a meaningful world with others. Among other things, these resources underlie shared understandings of people's actions and mutually comprehensible determinations of what makes sense to individual practitioners to do.

Institutional logics à la Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury are composed of assumptions, values, and principles. Values and principles resemble general understandings and rules qua activity-governing, practice-organizing entities (see Schatzki 2021). Whereas values can be seen as contained in general understandings and formulated in articulations of these understandings, principles are instances of rules. Ends (and affectivity), however, also give practices sens, though they find no place in institutional logics. This absence means that practice organizations are a richer practice-informing structure than institutional logics à la Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury. In more completely capturing how a practice orders the activities it comprises, my account provides a fuller basis for grasping why practitioners act and interact as they do when participating in it. Still, it must be emphasized, logics and practice organizations are structures of the same general sort, viz., contentful practice-governing orientations.

The actions that compose practices are performed by individuals. As a result, practice organizations, like institutional logics, can govern activities only if they connect to people. The previous section explained that, according to the institutional logics perspective, institutional logics *shape* cognitive phenomena (attention, identities, and schema), whose relationship to activity is one of generation. My account agrees with this perspective that practices shape minds. But there are two major differences. First, I construe mind, not as a generative cognitive apparatus, but in a Wittgensteinian manner as a dimension of human existence (the dimension of how things stand and are going for someone), which is articulated through the use of such ordinary language concepts as believing, desiring, thinking, fearing, hoping etc. (see Schatzki 1996). Second, although I cannot detail this presently, mind does not generate or give rise to activity. Mind instead gives activity form (à la Aristotle's distinction between efficient and formal causality): it governs activity in the sense of specifying *what it is* a person does. Practices, furthermore, shape mind by helping to give it content: the items that organize practices either come to be known—they become objects of knowledge—or are understandings that people possess. That is, participants know rules, know of normativized ends, tasks, and emotions, and know how what is acceptable or prescribed varies (if it does) with people's identities and roles. Practitioners also understand which bodily actions to perform in particular settings-situations in order to carry out particular intentional actions and possess understandings of general matters that other practitioners have understandings of, even if they disagree about how to put these matters into words. In sum, mind forms activity and is itself shaped—in the sense of being filled out—by what organizes practices.

Most people, moreover, tend to uphold those elements of what organizes the practices they carry on that they know or possess. It is the normativity of these elements in conjunction with the upbringing that practitioners undergo—the various forms of training, instruction, and sanctioning (not ceasing with adulthood) through which people develop the habit of upholding normativity—that brings it about that participants uphold organizations. (Of course, some individuals fail and others deliberately contravene normativity.) What, then, is responsible for *particular* organizing elements governing activities on particular occasions are such matters as the situations in which actors proceed and the courses of their lives to that point. This analysis dramatically diverges from the cognitive account that prominent institutional theorists offer of how institutional logics determine activity. As noted, the latter account marshals the celebrated making happen sort of causality in speaking of logics shaping attention, identities, and schemas and of the latter generating activity. On my account, the causality of this sort that is involved in organizations governing activity lies in the prior and ongoing formation of individuals with particular habits, understandings, and knowledge (for the broader picture of human activity that lies behind this account, see Schatzki 2010, chapt. 3).

It is important to stress that different participants in a practice are typically familiar with different subsets of the items that organize it. These differences reflect participants' individual learning histories and practice careers, including the different roles, positions, and identities they have occupied. At the same time, people's knowledges and understandings overlap, and to the extent they overlap they “share”

knowledge and understanding. But whereas people *share* knowledge and understanding, the understandings, rules, and teleoaffectivities that organize a practice are *common*—that is, *the same* regardless of who the participants are, how many participants there are, and how extensively they share knowledge and understanding. There is one structure that organizes a practice and as many familiarities with this structure as there are participants. Differences in familiarity are one source of disagreements and thence disputes or conflicts over exactly what is acceptable, prescribed, or intelligible in a practice. Note that the distinction between common and shared draws on the divergent intuitions that lie behind the either-or of conceptualizing institutional logics as objective contents or as belief systems. The multiplicity involved also differs from the one enshrined in what institutional theorists call “complexity.” The latter notion captures the existence of multiple institutional logics and the fact that individuals can be subject to multiple, contradictory ones. It is true that people participate in many practices and become familiar with numerous practice organizations that they cannot actively uphold simultaneously. But their familiarity with individual practices varies, too. I am not sure whether institutional theorists have acknowledged the parallel point.

3 How do institutional logics emerge and change?

In considering this question, it is necessary to distinguish societal from field-level logics. Societal logics, which govern large-scale institutional orders such as capitalism or science, are fewer and change only slowly; some can be likened to inertial rudders. Among the logics that Friedland and Alford mention, for example, principles such as “accumulation and the commodification of activity” (capitalism) or “truth and the symbolic construction of reality” (religion and science) reign for long periods of time and across large regions of space. Their longevity approaches that of phenomena assigned by Braudel (2009) to the *longue durée* of history. Of course, capitalism and science did not exist one or five millennia ago, respectively. What Friedland and Alford call institutional orders come about and have roughly datable periods of emergence. As Thornton et al. (2012, p. 104) write, “the institutional logics perspective ... assumes that each institutional order has a different age of origin and that the interinstitutional system evolved interdependently over historical time.” Institutional theorists have not studied this evolution. That work has generally been left to historians and historical social scientists. I suspect that, in the end, the emergence and evolution of societal logics take place in fundamentally similar ways as the emergence and evolution of field-level logics and that the differences between these processes concern such matters as length of time involved and number of sub-developments encompassed, thus also the character of the overviews that researchers provide of them. Regardless of how that might be, I concentrate on field-level logics in the following because of their greater lability and numbers (and also because their origins are more distinct).

Institutional theorists hold that human activity is the principal phenomena bringing about institutional logics and changes in them. This situation can be somewhat veiled in the literature because institutional theorists often identify particular forms

of activity or particular types of actor as one cause of change, thereby suggesting that things *other* than activity or actors are also responsible for change. The particular form of activity or type of actor involved is often connected to the idea of agency. It seems to me, however, that the things other than agency that are acknowledged as causes of change are often, overtly or in reality, concatenations of human activity. As a result, activity, in a *variety* of forms and agglomerations, turns out to bear principal responsibility for changes in institutional logics.

In a review, Micelotta et al. (2017) write that, over time, the institutional literature has focused on three sources of change: exogenous changes in institutional environments, institutional entrepreneurs, and improvisations in practices. Institutional entrepreneurs embody a paradigmatic kind of “agency,” namely, actions of particular individuals leading to major changes. The phenomena included under the category of “improvisations in practices” likewise embrace constellations of activity. For the expression “improvisations in practice” refers to changes, often series of cumulating smallish changes, that people initiate in the course of leading their lives carrying on the practices they normally carry on (e.g., Smets and Jarzabkowski 2013; Smets et al. 2012; Quattrone 2015; cf. on the side of practice theory, Warde 2016). This category can be widened to include processes occurring at the so-called “micro-level”—the level composed of individuals, activities, interactions, and practices—that either (1) originate changes that then spread through or lead to bigger changes in social life or (2) are mechanisms that effect this spread or amplification (e.g., Gray et al. 2015). Such processes involve changes, small or large, localized or spread out, that result from the successive, interconnected activities of different people. Of the three sources of change Micelotta, Lounsbury, and Greenwood discuss, only exogenous events such as shifts in political regimes, sociopolitical upheavals, technological innovations, and new regulatory environments change logics or lead to new ones on their own independent of activity (Micelotta et al. 2017, (7)).

In recent years, many institutional theorists have called for accounts of the “microfoundations” of institutional processes and changes. This call challenges the existence of direct causal connections between macrophenomena such as those identified by Micelotta, Lounsbury, and Greenwood as a third source of change. One prominent interpretation of the idea of microfoundations embraced in this literature is due to Coleman (1990; see also Little 1998). This interpretation holds that the connection between two macrophenomena is causal in character only if action pathways lead from the one to the other: it is in virtue of the action pathways that connect them that one macrophenomenon qualifies as bringing about or leading to the second. The contribution that the first macrophenomenon makes to the existence of this causal state of affairs is (1) to be a condition under which people initiate or effectuate the pathways involved or (2) to help so form the individuals involved that they perform the actions concerned. Either way, on Coleman’s account activities—in the form of action pathways—assume principal responsibility for the emergence and evolution of macrophenomena.

This sort of picture of the responsibility of activity for institutional changes is subtly displayed in Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury’s account. I don’t mean the authors’ application of Coleman’s conception of microfoundations to institutional logics in chapter four. I instead have in mind their account of the emergence and evo-

lution of field-level logics in chapter seven. On pp. 161–2, Thornton, Occasion, and Lounsbury write that “evolution and change in institutional logics can result from exogenous changes in societal and external logics, changes in the resource environment, and internal contradictions between symbolic representations and material practices in institutional fields.” On its face, this sentence claims that macrophenomena and changes in them can be directly responsible for changes in logics. If, however, one carefully examines figure 7.1 (151), which diagrammatically sums up their account of the cultural emergence of logics, and in which the macrophenomena mentioned in the above quote all have their places, one sees that there is only *one* pathway that directly leads to changes in logics. This pathway leads from (a) people, under certain conditions (including changes in practices), coming up with and using theories, frames, and narratives in speech and writing, through (b) the development of new vocabularies of practice (systems of labeled categories), to (c) people incorporating these vocabularies into both their material practices and what they say and write, thereby (d) engendering new or transformed field-level logics (see also 159). Exogenous changes in societal and external logics, changes in resource environments, and internal contradictions between symbolic representations and practices all contribute to this process by bearing on what people say and write, that is, by being *conditions* under which people develop particular theories, create and use particular frames, and spin out particular narratives (see also the remarks about embedded agency at Ocasio et al. 2017, (15–6)). Logics arise from the incorporation, into material practices, of textual developments, which themselves arise from (1) people’s attempts to understand their changing practices and the changing worlds in which they proceed and (2) their attention to changes in the principles and values at work in their own and others’ worlds (these are my interpretations of key pathways in figure 7.1). It is fair to say, consequently, that activity takes center stage in Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury’s account of the emergence and evolution of institutional logics.

This is enough to suggest that, although agency, or better, activity is, generally speaking, the central effector of changes in institutional logics, the relevant activity comes in concatenations, and happens under conditions, of certain pertinent types. These types are what institutional theorists detail in their accounts of change. As noted, for example, one sort of activity that institutional theorists widely credit for institutional changes is the activity of the entrepreneur, that is, single individuals. Another form noted above is a succession of activities, performed by different people while carrying out normal work, that introduces smallish changes that accumulate. A third form, just discussed, involves speaking, writing, and thinking about the changing world in a way that develops new vocabularies that inform and order further changes in ways of proceeding in this world. A fourth form, meanwhile, is the agglomeration of different people’s activities as a larger event or action. Organizational action is like this, as are changes to organizations such as mergers and sales of divisions, as is, more generally, everything that Harold Blumer (1969, 70) referred to as a “joint action:” “collective form[s] of action constituted by the fitting together of the behavior of separate individuals.” An important subclass of joint action is collective action (people joining together to seek particular changes), two important types of which in this context are politics and praxis as understood

in the Marxist tradition. One aim or byproduct of collective actions can be changes in institutional logics (see Seo and Douglas Creed 2002; Lounsbury et al. 2003). A fifth form, finally, is a series of actions that lead to changes in logics via an achievement such as the linking of issues, the attainment of legitimacy, and “catalytic amplification” (see Ansari et al. 2013).

The conditions, furthermore, under which activities or concatenations thereof lead to changes in logics are multiple. Two sorts prominent in the institutional logics literature have already been mentioned: exogenous events and conflicts or contradictions among institutional logics (or among other aspects of institutions; Seo and Douglas Creed 2002). Each has numerous subtypes. The idea that circumstantial innovations in ordinary practices can build up into larger or more far-flung changes (e.g., improvisations in practices) points to an important fact that resembles a point I (2019) have stressed about social change: that, in theory, changes in logics can arise from changes in activities under *any condition whatsoever*. For *any* occasion of activity is potentially the origin of a change of logics. This possibility does not gainsay the fact that particular sorts of condition such as exogenous changes or conflicts among logics can be especially fertile soils for the origination of changed logics. But it does put the researcher and practitioner on notice that some changes will arise in unusual or unexpected circumstances.

I should remind the reader that some social theories claim that mechanisms other than activity give rise to institutional changes. Examples of such theories are functionalism, structuralism, systems theory, and evolutionary selectionism (invoked at Thornton et al. 2012, p. 85?). I only mention this wider landscape in passing. For, I share the institutional logics perspective’s emphasis on activity.

4 How practice organizations emerge and change

Elsewhere (2019) I have argued that changes in social phenomenon arise from nexuses of activity chains and material events and processes. An “activity chain” is a series of activities, each of which reacts to its predecessor or to a change in the world brought about by its predecessor. Activity chains are concatenations of activities. They are, however, a particular sort of concatenation. To begin with, they include aspects of the material world. Material events and states of affair are elements of chains when—as regularly happens—activities give rise, and later activities react, to them. Material entities also mediate chains whenever people learn or know about that to which they react through a material medium such as an information and communications network, a broadcast medium, bangs on pipes, even air. Beyond encompassing material phenomena, chains exhibit a curious property, viz., that each link occurs retrospectively, by way of a later activity reacting to something that precedes it. And most important, activity chains are causal threads: that to which an activity reacts causes it in the sense of leading to it (though it is only because of the activity that the reacted-to phenomenon enjoys this status; cf. Mead 1980). Activity chains are thus cause-and-effect series that propagate through social life via retroactive links. Prominent types of activity chain include interaction, dialogue,

exchange, and governance (Schatzki 2019). Many chains propagate through the practice plenum haphazardly.

Social changes are almost always at least partially the product of nexuses of activity chains as opposed to single ones. This is because (a) any social change embraces a set of changes to a constellation of practice-arrangement bundles (see Schatzki 2019); this is as true of the restructuring of an economy as of the sale of an organization or an altered way of interacting. And (b) any collection of changes to a constellation of bundles is brought about by a set of activity chains. Activity chains, however, are not the only phenomenon responsible for changes to bundles. Material events and processes make up a second category of cause. The previous paragraph indicated that material occurrences mediate activity chains. Material occurrences can also cause changes in social phenomena independent of activity chains as when an earthquake, flood, or solar flare directly causes changes in material entities, arrangements, and connections that help compose social phenomena. Material processes such as the dispersion of smells, the propagation of sunlight, and wind and rain can also course through and suffuse practice-arrangement bundles (Schatzki 2019). And captured, created, and exploited material processes are crucial to the operations of bodies, artifacts, and appropriated natural entities, thus to the operations of arrangements of these entities, hence to the functioning of bundles and the practices they contain. The contribution of communications technology and related material processes to changes in educational practices consequent on the spread of SARS-CoV-2 is just a recent, conspicuous window onto a pervasive realm.

As stated, social changes arise from nexuses of activity chains and material occurrences. Changes to (including emergences of) practice organizations are social changes. It follows that changes in organization arise from such nexuses. This means, as on the institutional logics perspective, that activity—now in the form of activity chains—is the principal cause of changes in practice organizations. This is true whether, to draw on a distinction beloved of individualists, organizational changes are aimed at in particular actions that help compose chains or are byproducts of chains that no one seeks to bring about.

I noted above five prominent forms of action concatenation found in the institutional logics literature. From the institutional logics perspective, explaining social changes, including structural changes embracing altered values, principles, and assumptions, involves the specification of kinds of complex packages of activity concatenations and pathways that result in kinds of changes of interest. These specification often culminate in the kinds of diagram that appear throughout Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury's book. What I am claiming is that, *ultimately*, any package of concatenations and pathways of activity consists of activity chains plus something that institutional logics unevenly emphasizes: material processes. But my account does not simply specify a basic feature of the action complexes cited by the institutional logics perspective. It also espies a degree of contingency and haphazardness in the activity chains giving rise to social changes, including structural ones, that makes social explanation a more profoundly historical enterprise—tied to the specific twists and turns of history—than is the diagramming science to which institutional logics inclines.

I want now to give a little more content to the idea of structural changes arising from intentional and unintentional chains of activity. As discussed, practice organizations embrace rules, teleoaffectivities, and practical as well as general understandings. Of these, only rules, and to a lesser extent, teleoaffectivities can be reliably changed intentionally, whether through individual (entrepreneurs) or collective action (social movements, police action). Organizational change is intended when the actions of one or a group of individuals aim at the change and so inflect a continuing nexus of activity chains that the change results (see Schatzki 2019). Changes in rules and teleoaffectivities, however, are often unintentional. Such unintentional changes are byproducts of nexuses of chains, none of whose components aim at them (or those of whose components aim at them are ineffective in moving the chains in that direction). Whether organizational changes are intended or not, the chains that yield them can pass through—possibly haphazardly—the practice-arrangement bundles involved or circulate within them, possibly forming loops that accelerate the production or by-production of the changes. When organizational change is an unintended byproduct, the process of organizational change resembles the expanded version of the process of improvisations in practice (discussed in the previous section) that embraces “micro-processes.”

General understandings, meanwhile, are not easily changed through direct individual or collective targeting. The inherent openness of these understandings to multiple articulations means that they are continually evolving as people put them into words and other people react to these formulations (see Schatzki 2002). The susceptibility of general understandings to multiple articulations also makes it difficult for anyone or any group to make particular articulations authoritative. Only when an institution can claim a monopoly on interpretation (e.g., the Pope and his word, a church denomination and its doctrine, a supreme court and its judgments) can individuals or groups intentionally change general understandings half reliably. In all cases, moreover, disputation and discussion are key activity-chain nexuses through which general understandings evolve. This holds for organizational changes more broadly.

Practical understandings are likewise infrequently the target of intentional change. Practical understandings coevolve with changes in the actions people perform and the bodily actions they carry out to perform them. This coevolution, though not exactly nonconscious, is usually under no one’s control and often a step ahead of what people are aware of. It is neither an intentional nor a deliberative process. Sometimes, moreover, certain individuals lead the way, carrying out new actions or, far more likely, carrying out existing actions in new ways. Among the many conditions that changes such as these can reflect and be intelligible to others under, are happenstance circumstances and evolutions in technology. The new action or way of performing an action might also propagate through society via imitation or as occasioned by the widespread occurrence of the circumstances or technological changes involved (see Schatzki 2019). All these processes bear some resemblance to the process of practice improvisation. Of course, even practical understanding can be intentionally targeted; an example was the shift in the spring of 2020 through exhortation and example of how people greeted one another, from shaking hands to

bumping elbows. Prior to that spring it would have been unintelligible for anyone to greet another person this way.

The birth of many new practice organizations is similarly unintentional. The birth of a new practice organization is one with the development of a new practice. The development of a new practice, moreover, is the coalescence of an open set of organized doings and saying. Some practices are deliberately established; examples include parliamentary procedures, assembly line or factory practices, and military training regimens. Practices and their organizations are intentionally established when individuals or groups who intend to establish them are able, through their actions, to instigate activity chains that eventuate in their existence (Schatzki 2019). Deliberately instituted practices are still only partly instituted, however: for they typically take over already existing practices (e.g., of deliberation, craft production, and informal or rivals' training regimens) or leave enough of what is to happen in them unspecified to allow practitioners, over time, to fill out what organizes them by extending activity chains that circulate within or pass through the bundles involved.

Other practices come into existence through the unintended, gradual coalescence of a cluster of doings and sayings governed by core ends, tasks, rules and understandings (cf. Smets and Jarzabkowski 2013). This coalescence is effected through a tangle of criss-crossing and looping, partly haphazard and partly regimented, activity chains that no individual or group has so inflected as to have this result: it is a byproduct of this tangle. It is likely, moreover, that the activities that compose these chains do not react to the practice and its organization as such, at least as the organized practice initially coalesces. The individuals involved instead simply go about their business pursuing their ends, reacting to prior events, and setting up and rearranging their worlds, all the while paying attention to what's going on around them and to what other people are doing and saying. Multiple people doing this in a given walk of life (a normal social condition) can instigate and gradually lead to an array of (1) rules and ends that they uphold and pursue, (2) a shared pool of intelligible ways of carrying out particular actions, and (3) a shared diffuse sense of things, possibly formulated in what they say, that imbues what they do. At any point along the way, moreover, people can become aware of and begin to react to the coalescing practice and its organization, thereby making the emergent practice and its organization components of the ongoing activity chain nexus that is effecting them. At least at first, however, this coalescence results from people reacting to and aiming at states of affairs, and thereby extending nexuses of activity, that are not overtly connected to or consciously associated with the emerging practice. The fact that the doings and saying involved tend to happen in settings of the same kind (e.g., workplace, cooking area, domestic quarters, meeting place etc.) facilitates the coalescence of a distinct set of organized activities.

In addition, practices and what organizes them are continually changing, again due to activity chains that course within and through the practice-arrangement bundles involved. As before, these changes are intentional only if an action(s) aiming at them so bends the continuing nexus that the changes result. Often, however, it is simply through people (1) pursuing whatever ends and projects they are pursuing in reaction to particular states of affairs, (2) bodily doing what is needed in current settings-situations to carry out particular actions, and (3) thinking about and talking

to others about what is going on, how things should be done, and how things could be different, that shifts occur in the rules that are upheld in the practices involved, the tasks and ends that are acceptably or expected to be pursued there, and whatever senses of things imbue the proceedings. Indeed, simply by virtue of people leading their everyday lives and enacting practices, practices and their structures metamorphose.

Finally, a word should be said about the contribution material events and processes make to the emergence and evolution of practice organizations. Material events and processes can contribute to all the processes of emergence and evolution described in previous paragraphs (Schatzki 2019). They generally do so by bearing on or mediating chains of action. For instance, the projects and tasks that are acceptable or prescribed in communication practices evolve along with changes in the ICTs that are used in or that support those practices, even if the normativized ends pursued do not change. The discussion earlier in this section already noted, furthermore, that changes in practical understandings occur as new tasks arise in association with, and as the execution of existing tasks evolves to accommodate, new ICTs. Material events can also more directly affect which ends, projects, tasks, and even emotions are normativized. A natural disaster can suddenly reorder the practices pursued by an aid organization so that it is more responsive to the needs of affected populations and their environments. Challenges emanating from nature can likewise instigate changes in practical understandings when they “force” people to alter what they do. An example mentioned above is the evolution in practical understandings of how to greet people consequent on the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2. Material events can even instigate changes in general understandings as when repeated severe weather erodes the general sense of security or chosenness that imbues a group’s practice-arrangement bundles. And this is not to mention the many ways that material events, processes, and states of affair can mediate activity chain nexuses whose byproducts include the coalescence of a practice or changes in what organizes extant practices.

5 Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated a strong convergence between institutional logics and practice theories. To demonstrate this convergence, it has not discussed the full ranges of either institutional logics or practice approaches. To document this exciting development in the theory of social structure, it has instead focused on a leading representative of each approach, the institutional logics approach of Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury and my own practice theory. Both these approaches conceptualize contentful practical orientations—in one case principles, values, and assumptions, in the other understandings, rules, and teleoaffectivities—that organize human activity. In each instance, furthermore, these contentful orientations work through mind, in the one case shaping a posited cognitive apparatus that generates activity and in the other giving content to a dimension of existence that in turn gives form to what people do. Both accounts also maintain that changes in organizing orientations are brought about through congeries of activity and have similar Bourdieu/Giddens-like visions of how activity maintains structure. It is true that the two approaches

evinced significant differences. These concern (1) how the purported orientations are responsible for activities, (2) conceptualizing the action nexuses that at once are governed by and give rise to changes in organizing orientations, (3) recognition of the extensive role that materiality plays in these processes, and, although I did not discuss this, (4) the question whether social reality contains levels. Nonetheless, their ideas about the structures that govern activity converge, and at bottom their accounts of how activity effects changes in structure are remarkably similar. The fact that they theorize the structures of different entities—my approach, particular practices, and the institutional logics approach, constellations of practices—opens the way to combining them.

Future research could attend to the tasks of combining these and other institutional logics and practice theories and using the resulting amalgams to investigate particular social phenomena. An example of such work is ongoing, still unpublished collaborative research by Friedland and Schatzki. The amalgamation of their views that they are working on involves, among other things, merging Friedland's conception of the institutional substances that inform practices with Schatzki's conception of what organizes them: substances qua teleo-ontologies are conceptualized as at once teli and general understandings. What's more, whereas practice organizations comprise normativized orders more numerous than those that actually specify what participants do in the practices involved, substances are specific abstract concept-principles that inform these practices, for example, the ends participants pursue and the meanings of objects therein. Substances so understood exhibit the structural feature of categorical difference from what they (in)form and, also like practice organization, can be altered by the activities they form. Friedland and Schatzki are using the conceptual framework that results from this combination of their views to study contemporary digital economic phenomena, in particular, blockchains and cryptocurrencies.

The convergence between institutional logics and practice theory discussed in this essay opens up further collaborations that construct amalgamated conceptual frameworks and use the resulting conceptions of structure to study social life. The time is ripe to further develop this new form of structuralism.

Declarations

Conflict of interest T.R. Schatzki declares that he/she has no competing interests.

Ethical standards For this article no studies with human participants or animals were performed by any of the authors. All studies mentioned were in accordance with the ethical standards indicated in each case.

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